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FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4196  
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SINGAPORE 001870

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/09/2017

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SUBJECT: BURMA: SINGAPORE RULING PARTY MP WANTS TOUGHER  
ASEAN ACTION

REF: SINGAPORE 1851

Classified By: EP Chief Ike Reed. Reasons 1.4(b)(d)

11. (C) ASEAN needs to move beyond statements and take action against the regime in Burma, Singapore ruling party MP Charles Chong told us October 5. Chong, who is a leader of the ASEAN Inter Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus (AIPMC), said ASEAN should consider either suspending Burma from the organization or adopting targeted sanctions against the regime and its leaders if it doesn't undertake positive change. He plans to question Foreign Minister George Yeo during the next sitting of parliament (scheduled for October 22) on what steps ASEAN will take against Burma and the possibility of suspension or Singapore imposing sanctions.

12. (C) Chong interpreted the October 4 Barry Desker op-ed (Reftel) calling for ASEAN to suspend Burma as a trial balloon by the government to lay out possible next steps against the regime. However, he believed the GOS would take a very deliberate approach to the question of sanctions or suspension and noted Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew's October 4 comments to a local student audience that "it is in the interest of every country in ASEAN to help stabilise Myanmar." In addition, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong told the Straits Times in an October 4 interview that "sanctions against a regime ready to isolate itself are more likely to be counter-productive than effective."

13. (C) Given the large number of Buddhists in Singapore and the prestige of monks, the Singapore public was sympathetic to the protesters in Burma and was repulsed by the regime's violent response, Chong noted. The GOS had to come out with a tough statement as ASEAN Chair in order to stay in step with public opinion. Chong noted that more MPs were contacting him about Burma and what could be done, beyond the other four Singaporean members of the AIPMC. Chong also suggested that public sympathy for the demonstrations in Burma could have a positive effect on Singapore if it caused people to question Singapore's stringent restrictions against public assemblies.

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